

# TAKAYAMA FESTIVAL TOUR

## Details

Duration: 12 Nights

Max Group size: 10

Starts in: Tokyo

Ends in: Tokyo

## Prices

Start Date	Finish Dates	Price	Spaces available	Reference	Hotel Level
11 Apr 2024	23 Apr 2024	£3,250.00	Only 2 places left!	0424TY	Mid
06 Oct 2024	18 Oct 2024	£3,250.00	8	1024TY	Mid
11 Apr 2025	23 Apr 2025	£3,350.00	10	0425TY	Mid
06 Oct 2025	18 Oct 2025	£3,350.00	10	1025TY	Mid

## Overview

The Takayama Festival Tour is a tour in Japan with a difference. You experience the highlights of Japan such as Tokyo and Kyoto, but at the heart of this tour is the experience of the **Takayama festival**, unheard of by many travellers, and experienced by fewer.

The **Takayama festival is over 500 years old**, and although now adopting many 20th century features, is essentially unchanged in that time. There are two festivals, one in the spring and one in the autumn and each has a different spiritual centre: renewal in the first, and harvest in the second. Both show off the ages-old tradition of parading with shrines carried on shoulders or drawn on wheels by traditionally clad revellers.

The streets of Takayama are full of festival decorations, music, dancing and the very earthly revelry of eating and drinking during the festival. The city is picturesque, preserving many historical and venerable buildings and is surrounded by impressive mountains.

You also visit Shirakawa-go, a village of wooden, thatched houses built hundreds of years ago and preserved – but still home to families and a real community. Journeyming to Takayama from Tokyo, you visit Hakone, home of Fuji, historical sites, high culture and touristy distractions.

After Takayama you travel to the cultural and historical heart of Japan, Kyoto, where you will meet many of the **UNESCO World Heritage sites**, witness performing arts, take part in a tea ceremony, see apprentice geisha dance, soak in hot springs, and of course sample more the country's famed culinary heritage. With our personalised service and flexible, customisable itineraries, we put the adventure into Japan tours (<http://www.dragonflytours-japan.com>). Don't just take our word for it, read the latest reviews (<http://www.dragonflytours-japan.com/testimonials>) from customers who have enjoyed our tours.

If you would like to discuss the Takayama Festival tour in depth, please contact us (<http://www.dragonflytours-japan.com/contact-us>).

The Takayama Tour is fully guided; all accommodation, entrance fees and city to city transportation is included as well as a whole lot more. For the full list of inclusions, please check the "Other Info" tab above.

## Itinerary

### Summary

Day 01	Group meal; Walking tour of Shinjuku and Kabukicho Entertainment District	Tokyo
Day 02	Tsukiji Fish Market; Hakone; Samurai Museum; Natural Hot Springs	Hakone (Mount Fuji)
Day 03	Hell's Valley; Cable Car; Views of Mt.Fuji; Lake Ashi; Pirate Ship; Cedar Avenue; Old Tokaido Highway Checkpoint	Hakone (Mount Fuji)
Day 04	Bullet Train; Takayama Festival	Takayama
Day 05	Free Day at the Takayama Festival and Surrounding Area	Takayama
Day 06	Village of Shirakawa-go (UNESCO); Home Cooked Local Meal; Hot Springs; Stay in Old Thatched Cottage	Ogimachi
Day 07	Open-Air Museum; Kanazawa; Kenrokuen garden; Nomura samurai residence	Kanazawa
Day 08	Eastern Kyoto; Kiyomizudera (UNESCO); Gion Geisha District; Cultural Show of performing arts (optional)	Kyoto
Day 09	Ryoanji Zen Garden; Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion) and Nijo Castle (All three UNESCO sites)	Kyoto
Day 10	Free day to explore more of Kyoto and the surrounding area - or join a cultural workshop!	Kyoto
Day 11	Tea ceremony; Fushimi Inari mountain shrine; Miyako Odori geisha performance (on spring tour only)	Kyoto

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Day 12	Morning Free in Kyoto; Bullet Train to Tokyo	Tokyo
Day 13	End of tour. Why not stay for a few extra nights, there is plenty more to see and do nearby!	Journey's end

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\* Gassho-Zukuri - Traditional thatched farmhouse unique to the Shirakawa-go area, it's a fantastic cultural experience. Here you sleep on futon, there are no en-suite bathroom options available.

\*\* Ryokan- Traditional Japanese inn, sleeping on futons in rooms floored with tatami mats.

#### Notes

We recommend arriving in Japan a day or two before the Takayama Festival Tour starts to help with acclimatization and overcome any jet lag. We can organize any additional nights at the tour hotel and will be pleased to meet you at the airport (at either Narita or Haneda) and transfer with you to the hotel (up to one week before the start of the tour), making your transition as smooth as possible. We'll also run through the maps with you, answering all your questions and setting you off on your first adventures, here in one of the world's greatest metropolises..

What, you want to see and experience even more? A popular after-tour excursion for the Takayama Tour is instead of returning with the group to Tokyo on Day 12, why not visit Hiroshima and / or Miyajima? If you have the time, guests often also love to spend a couple of days relaxing and soaking up the atmosphere on the famous art island of Naoshima.

If this is of interest, or any other excursions, please just drop us a line and we'll be happy to organize your after-tour adventure!

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## Itinerary

### Details

#### Day 1 - Tokyo

The Takayama Festival Tour starts this evening; Dragonfly Tours hosts a meal at a local restaurant, where your tour of Japan kicks off with a tour of the Japanese palate. This is also a great way for everyone in the group to get to know each other. After the meal, we walk around the neon lit streets of the infamous **Kabukicho** night time entertainment district as it all comes alive.

#### Day 2 - Hakone (Mount Fuji)

Today's destination on the Takayama Festival Tour is **Hakone**, the National Park beside **Mt Fuji**. However, before heading off, you take a short subway ride to **Tsukiji Outer Fish Market** buzzing with atmosphere, stalls, shops and restaurants. After exploring the market you have a chance to taste some of the freshest sushi and sashimi you will find anywhere. You may wish to complete the experience by washing the succulent cuts of fish down with a glass of sake.

Later in the morning you leave Tokyo for Hakone taking around 90 minutes. Staying with the theme of the tour, we go to the **samurai museum**. However the Hakone area is blessed with a surprising number of museums of fine art, and you are free to split away from the group and visit one of these others as an alternative. There is the **Open Air Museum** featuring art by Henry Moore and Pablo Picasso and the collection of the **Pola Museum** includes pieces by Van Gogh, Monet and Renoir. The Pola Museum building is itself an amazing piece of architecture of concrete and glass. (Be aware that the museums are dotted around the national park, and even for the most dedicated culture vulture, it isn't possible to see everything in one day.)

If museums aren't your thing, you may wish to simply relax and soak the day away in the revitalizing **natural hot springs**.

#### Day 3 - Hakone (Mount Fuji)

Day 3 of the Takayama Festival tour starts soon after breakfast to avoid the day trippers coming in from Tokyo. You take the cable car up the mountain to **Owakudani**, "**Hell's Valley**". From this **craggy volcano**, you should be able to see **Mount Fuji** in its full majesty. Eggs that have been cooked in the volcanic waters are sold here. The process turns them black and, it is said, for every egg you eat extends your life by seven years. From the summit of Hell's Valley, you descend to **Lake Ashi** by cable car with all the views it affords. Next, catch the **pirate ship** across the lake to the reproduction of the **Hakone checkpoint**, this may be a remake but the original checkpoint was very significant in its day.

During the Edo era (1603-1868) the Tokugawa shogunate imposed strict regulations monitoring and controlling travellers and merchandise. The regulations were enforced by 52 such checkpoints, and this one is thought to have been the largest and most important – not to mention a cause of considerable anxiety for travellers of the day. Following years of research, the checkpoint was re-built using traditional methods and tools, and was opened to the public in the spring of 2007.

From here, you walk along a stretch of the ancient highway lined with **huge cedar trees**, planted on the orders of the shogun to shade the travellers from the winter snows and the intense summer sun. After this stretch you can take a bus back to the hotel or you can continue walking along the ancient highway, which still has sections of the original paving. There is something very special about walking on these cobbles, under the very same trees that some of the greatest people in Japanese history have walked (or been carried along in palanquins). Shogun, armies of samurai, noblemen, writers, peasants, courtesans, and ninja in disguise all took this route.

#### Day 4 - Takayama

This morning you board the **Shinkansen (bullet train)** and make our way to the mountain city of **Takayama** where the festival that is the centrepiece of your trip is heating up.

Eagle-eyed readers will have noticed there are two Takayama Tours at different times, this is because there are two **Takayama festivals**. As with so many Japanese rites, nature and the seasons are immensely important. The festival to welcome spring takes place amongst the delicate pinks and whites of the blooming cherry blossoms. In contrast, the autumn festival celebrates the harvest.

The highlights of both festivals, which date from the 15th century, come in the evenings, when colourful dashi (floats), are lead through the streets amid cheers and drums. There are a number of small rivers running through the old town and the parades will pass over the beautiful vermilion bridges that span them.

#### Day 5 - Takayama

Japanese festivals are the heart of the life of the community and just one day is rarely enough for a proper celebration. The festival continues today but there is no tour itinerary. You are free to explore on your own and soak up the atmosphere and the sights as floats and parades weave their way through the old town.

#### Day 6 - Ogimachi

This morning you take the bus to the picturesque village of **Shirakawa-go**. Nestled deep in the mountains, it's an idyllic place with age-old traditions and architecture now lost to most of the country. You spend the night in a **gassho zukuri** (a traditional **thatched farm house**) that is over 250 years old. The rooms are homely and you sleep on comfortable futons on tatami flooring. These are not recreations of Japanese historical Japanese homes, they are the real thing.

This is also a living community – most of these beautiful old buildings are family homes. Imagine living like this all year round. You have plenty of time to stroll around the village and get a taste of the community spirit at the heart of this place. The local people here still work together in building and maintaining these magnificent houses, re-thatching them every 25-35 years.

In the evening you are served a **home cooked meal** made with ingredients from the local mountains. After dinner you may wish to visit the nearby fantastic onsen (hot spring). If you've never been to an onsen before then this is a good one to start with. If you don't think onsen are your thing, (communal bathing doesn't appeal to all) the farmhouse has its own private washing facilities.

## Day 7 - Kanazawa

After breakfast and some free time to explore more of the village you take a bus for Kanazawa, like Kyoto a historic city and also like Kyoto, spared the bombing of the Second World War. The hotel is close to the station and most of the town's main attractions, including the geisha districts, samurai houses, and the world-famous Kenrokuen garden.

**Kenrokuen** is considered one of the three best gardens in Japan – and many consider it the best. Once the private gardens of the ruling samurai family, the garden was developed and improved over 200 years to become what you see today. It is the essential Japanese garden: manicured trees, waterfalls, rock gardens, a teahouse by a tranquil pond; the ideal blend of art and nature.

Next, you visit the **Nomura Samurai Residence**. The Nomura family flourished with their class during the Edo period but during the Meiji Restoration the samurai lost their reason for existing, their status and eventually their wealth. The Nomura house was sold to a member of the newly ascendant merchant class but is now restored as it would have been under the Nomura family. The house provides a privileged look into history, evoking the lifestyle of a class that holds enduring fascination.

If you wish to set off on your own, you have the option of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art just over the road from Kenrokuen, or the nearby Omicho market, the gastronomic heart of Kanazawa.

## Day 8 - Kyoto

Moving ever onward, the next destination is **Kyoto**, the heart and soul of Japan. Here you visit **Kiyomizudera**, UNESCO World Heritage site, a temple perched on stilts on the mountainside and appearing to float on the forest. Visitors flock here from far and wide to pray and wish for their most heartfelt desires, from meeting their ideal lover to promotion at work; from exam success to miraculous cures for health troubles.

From Kiyomizudera you walk along the winding atmospheric cobbled streets to **Gion**, the main geisha district of Kyoto where we conclude today's guided tour. In the evening you will have the opportunity to attend a show that takes you deep into the cultural heart of the country. It includes performances of koto (Japanese harp), gagaku (court music), kyomai (maiko apprentice geisha performing a traditional dance), kado (flower arrangement) and bunraku (puppet theatre). Also, if you've ever wanted to don a kimono and dress up as a geisha today is your chance!

## Day 9 - Kyoto

Today is steeped in beauty, history, art, and intrigue. You visit the three principal World Heritage sites in Kyoto, each are very different and each help to tell the story of how we understand Japan today.

You start with **Ryoanji** and the Zen garden that defines Zen gardens. Fifteen rocks set in a swirling gravel bed. However, you only see 14 of the rocks because only the truly enlightened see all 15. As you strive for enlightenment you might contemplate the enigmatic phrase "Ware tada taru shiru" (I only plenty know), which is carved into the water receptacle at the back of the temple.

Next you see one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, **Kinkakuji** – the famous Golden Pavilion. The pavilion is covered in gold leaf and stands next to a pond that captures the reflection in its shimmering surface. The pond and the pavilion stand in a classic Japanese garden. The Golden Pavilion is another UNESCO World Heritage site and was the centrepiece of Yukio Mishima's novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*.

The exploration of Kyoto's history continues as you go on to Nijo-jo – **Nijo Castle** – built by the Tokugawa shogunate as a symbol of power. It's a building full of national treasures and walking down the corridors on the "nightingale flooring" which sings as you tread – alerting the shogun to unwelcome visitors – carries you back in time to feudal days.

## Day 10 - Kyoto

This is a **free day** set aside for shopping, relaxing and exploring. There is so much to do in Kyoto and the surrounding area. Your tour leader will offer plenty of suggestions and let you in on a few local secrets to help you make the most of your day.

Perhaps you would like to attend a workshop for one of the following:

- Taiko (traditional drumming)
- Ikebana (flower arranging)
- Wearing a kimono
- Cooking class at a local home
- Sake tasting
- Shodo (Calligraphy)
- Paper craft with Washi paper

If interested, please let us know in advance and we'll get it arranged for you!

This day is also an opportunity to take a trip to one of the neighbouring cities: **Osaka, Nara or Kobe**. Nara is another UNESCO trove and a former capital of Japan that predates even Kyoto. Osaka is Kansai's commercial powerhouse, and centre of more worldly delights in its profusion of restaurants and night spots. Kobe is a fashionable and affluent city with a cosmopolitan tone, derived from its history as one of the first places to admit foreign residents when Japan opened its Chrysanthemum Curtain in the 19th century.

## Day 11 - Kyoto

The **tea ceremony** is the definition of serenity, and this morning you have the chance to find out what it's all about and experience it for yourself. You participate in a ceremony in a teahouse that has been performing the art and supplying the tea to the Nishi Honganji temple for seven generations.

From here the tour proceeds to **Fushimi-Inari** shrine located just south of Kyoto. This is another of Kyoto's most photographed spots. Thousands of vermilion torii shrine gates lead up a winding path into the hill. The patron of Fushimi-Inari is the fox, a messenger of the gods, but the shrine is dedicated to rice, Japan's staple. Fushimi-Inari has thousands of sub-shrines all over Japan, and has been adopted by merchants and business people, who pray here for success in their enterprises.

On the spring festival tour, we have tickets for the Miyako Odori reserved for this evening. The event dates back to 1872 featuring geiko and maiko of Gion in a colourful and mesmerizing series of dances.

## Day 12 - Tokyo

The only thing planned for today is the bullet train ride back to **Tokyo** which takes around three hours. While the tour normally heads back to Tokyo in the morning, you are free to set your own timetable, and our representatives will book you on to the Shinkansen of your choice and provide help and advice for your last hours in this fascinating city.

## Day 13 - Journey's end

Sadly, today is the last day of this unforgettable trip. Narita International Airport is about an hour away, alternatively, why not stay a couple of extra days? Dragonfly Tours can help with whatever arrangements you wish to make.

## Accommodation



### Tokyo - Yaesu Terminal Hotel

A comfortable, clean, and efficient business hotel with helpful staff situated in a great location near Tokyo Station and the Imperial Palace. As you would expect for such a prime piece of real estate, the rooms are not so big but it has everything you need and much more!

LAN and Wifi

Breakfast included



### Hakone - Shinanoki Ichinoyu

Rooms are a modern hybrid of a traditional inn and a hotel. With each room having an outside bath on the balcony you'll probably find yourself more out than in.

Wifi available

Traditional Japanese breakfasts and delicious dinners included



### Takayama - Takayama Ouan

Located close to the station, it has modern but traditional style rooms and hot springs on the roof with views over the city.

All rooms have LAN

Breakfast included



### Shirakawa-go - Kidoya

Traditional 250 year old farm house with thatched roof. Friendly owners and delicious handmade seasonal foods.

Wi-Fi available

Breakfast and excellent dinner included.



### Kanazawa - Daiwa Roynet Hotel

Hotel close to Kanazawa station, the idea; spot from which to explore the city.

All rooms have wi-fi

Breakfast included



### Kyoto - Dormy Inn Premium

Comfortable, clean & efficient hotel close to Kyoto station, the hub of the city. The hotel has coin-laundry facilities; computers are available for use in the lobby and it also has an onsen (hot spring bath) and free ramen noodles in the evening.

All rooms have LAN & Wifi.

Breakfast included.

Please note that the accommodation above is standard for the Takayama Festival Tour but is at times subject to change to a similar or better hotel.

All hotels have been selected with location and comfort in mind.

## Other Information

### What's Included?

- ALL accommodation. (12 nights)
- The support of your Tour Leader for the entirety of the tour.

- Entrance fees to Museums, Temples, Shrines and Gardens when with the guide as shown on the itinerary summary are included. Visiting alternative sites at personal expense.
- ALL city to city transportation including the shinkansen bullet train.
- ALL local transportation is covered while following the set guided itinerary. (Any non-guided side-excursions at personal expense)
- Suica card - An electronic travel card for your convenience (saves messing around with tickets)
- Meet & greet at the airport in Tokyo (either Narita or Haneda) on arrival and (Guided) transfer to the tour hotel in Tokyo up to one week before the starting date of the tour.
- Tickets for transfer at the end of the tour (transfer is non-guided)
- Authentic Tea Ceremony at a tea house in Kyoto
- Baggage forwarding for one case / bag per person
- Miyako Odori (Geisha Spring Dance) - On spring tours only
- Breakfast every morning.
- Group meal on Day 1 in Tokyo (Alcoholic drinks included!)
- Dinners (Traditional Teishoku) on Days 2 and 3 at Hakone
- Dinners (Traditional Kaiseki Ryori) on Day 6 at Shirakawa-go
- Tour Info-Pack
- 100% payment protection through the TTA (our membership number is U6165)

### What's not included?

- Meals, except for the ones mentioned above
- Any coin lockers that you may use
- Travel Insurance. You must take out travel insurance before travelling to Japan, we suggest this is done soon after a booking has been made.
- Flights to and from Japan!

### Payments

After a booking request has been made through the "Make a Booking" section of this website, your booking will be processed. We'll email you back to confirm it along with your invoice and payment details, we accept payments by card or bank transfer. The deposit of GBP 300 / USD 400 per person is requested within 7 days to confirm your booking. The balance is due by 12 weeks prior to the tour departure date. All payment made to us are protected by the TTA (Travel Trust Association). Our membership number is U6165.

### Flexibility

The itineraries in our tours are flexible, and do vary occasionally, sometimes due to weather or on-going events such as festivals which guests may want to see. In addition if there is something else you'd like to do or see on your trip please mention this to your tour leader and we'll try our best to ensure you can do it.

### Age / Requirements / Fitness

The **Takayama Festival Tour** is suitable for ages of around 12 and upwards, and is ideal for families, couples, and singles alike. All ages are welcome and the eldest guest we've had on one of our Small Group Tours, to date, is 87 – she was one of the fittest members in the group!

Our only requirements are English speaking ability (all tours are conducted in English) and a zest for life! While Olympic levels of fitness are not necessary, on average we walk around 3 to 5 kilometres per day, steps are involved at some of the tourist sites we visit as are slopes. Most stations do have escalators but not all and an extended time is spent on the feet each day. If you have any questions about this, please just let us know.

Having said all that, walking is done at an easy pace, with plenty of stops for ice cream and to absorb the sights. In the unlikely event that an excursion is going to be too taxing or if you have another preference, you are welcome to break away from the group at any time. No part of the itinerary is compulsory; we like to keep things as fun and flexible as possible!

### Transportation

As with all our Small Group Tours in Japan (<http://www.dragonflytours-japan.com/#tours>) we use the extremely efficient, clean, safe and reliable public transportation network. - It's the most efficient way to get around, and by far it's the best way to experience the country and its people. This is not a tour bus holiday with fixed tourist trap set lunches and carpet sales in the afternoon! At times, particularly in Kyoto when using the city bus it might not always be possible to sit. For longer journeys we use the bullet train and seats are reserved in advance.

### Baggage Forwarding

We do at times forward your main cases ahead from one hotel to another (one case per person) allowing you to travel light and easy keeping things as fun as possible. If you bring too much luggage with you, or buy too many souvenirs during the tour and require additional use of the service, this can easily be arranged. The service is cheap and reliable.

### Minimum Numbers

The minimum number of passengers on the Takayama Tour is two as we believe it's unfair to cancel tours when larger numbers are not met.

### Single Supplement

Because we keep the group size to a maximum of 10, unfortunately we have to charge a single supplement of £ 400 if travelling alone. For this you'll be ensured to have a room to yourself for the entirety of the tour, except for when staying at traditional accommodation, here we may ask you to share a room with another member of the group of the same sex. If you have any questions about this, please drop us a line.